



## agriculture & rural development

Department:  
Agriculture and Rural Development  
**PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL**

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### **SPEAKING NOTES FOR MEC'S VISIT TO UMSHWATI FOR AN OVERSIGHT VISIT TO A POTATO MACHINE AND OTHER PROJECTS**

**MONDAY, 14 MARCH 2016**

**VENUE: EKUPHOLENI HALL, UMSHWATI**

DEPUTY MAYOR, COUNCILLOR SS MBHELE

SPEAKER, COUNCILLOR NMN MSOMI

ALL COUNCILLORS PRESENT

MRS .N. MAGWAZA OF THE NDUNANKYULU TRIBAL AUTHORITY

MUNICIPAL MANAGER MR NM MABASO & HIS MANAGEMENT TEAM

MEMBERS OF THE GCUMISA, ESTEZI AND BAXOLELENI COOPERATIVES

LIVESTOCK FARMERS ASSOCIATIONS

ALL FARMERS PRESENT

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

President Zuma in his State of the Nation Address this year, reminded us of the nine-point plan to revive the economy. At the top of the list, is the Revitalisation of the agriculture and agro-processing value-chain.

I visited farming projects this morning and found out more about the **municipality's agri-business strategy**. I am now convinced that Umshwati can lead the way in the province to show how agriculture can grow the local economy. All that is required, is for you the farmers and us as provincial and local government, to work together to build on the potential that exists in this area.

I went to the Swayimani Potato washer and potato communal estate project. I must thank the cooperatives involved in the project for their patience in waiting for the installation of the potato washer. There have been many challenges in getting this off the ground. Last year, the KZN Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (KZN DARD) pulled out all stops to ensure that this project

becomes a reality. The water is to be connected and the machine will be operative this month.

What really inspired me was that the farmers involved did not just fold their arms and wait. When the potato seed was not available within the planting season, they dug into their own pockets and bought inputs for the planting of green mealies. This is the kind of initiative that is needed.

Going into the future, government is saying that we cannot do the farming for the farmers. Yes, we will continue to invest substantially and fully in community agricultural enterprises, but the projects that stand a good chance of such investment is when the cooperatives and farmers show initiative and commitment. The cooperatives involved in the Swayimane Potato project have demonstrated their commitment. This is why the Department in 2016, undertook to procure the potato inputs and complete the potato washer. So far 50 hectares have been available for growing potatoes. There is the potential to grow up to 600 hectares and more of potatoes. I urge you to think big and look to a future where Umshwati can become the potato capital of our province.

The key is for projects supported by the Department to be run on sound business principles and to demonstrate sustainability. This is the only way that we can revitalise agriculture to ensure that it contributes to growing the local economy. To do this, KZN DARD is working with the local municipality. Previously, a criticism of government was that different departments worked on their own and the left hand did not know what the right hand was doing. This allowed some people to exploit the situation, they would approach KZN DARD for seeds and inputs, use these up and then approach the local municipality or the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform for grants and more inputs. We call this double-dipping. With the introduction of Agri-Parks all government departments are working together and the plan is to put an end to double-dipping and to ensure that the farmers that are supported are those who are committed to sustainability and the business of farming.

The Umshwati Municipality has an exciting and far-reaching agri-business strategy for this area. KZN DARD will be on hand to support this strategy. There are plans to assist livestock owners to commercialise their operations and improve the quality of their breeds. This would involve the development of feedlots, yard sales and the plan is to establish an abattoir in the area. The Agri-business strategy is focused on growing sugar, poultry and piggery opportunities and to enhance crop production. The vision includes the provision of food production support units that will process local agricultural products.

You as farmers, have the potential to become great and to lead the way. You are already doing this in the sugar sector, where a group of communal farmers are producing better yields than commercial farmers. This is as a result of joint venture between KZN DARD and the South African Sugar Research Institute (SASRI). What we have here is an example of applied research helping subsistence farmers to move into the first economy. Researchers in the Department have been working jointly with SASRI and 906 communal farmers since 2001. Using technology and improved farming methods, they have managed to grow their yields to such an extent that they are doing better than the large-scale commercial farmers. Even with the current drought, the farmers

expect to produce over 39 000 tons of sugar. The project has won awards and the researchers involved including William Gillespie from SASRI, Felicity Mitchell from the Department and others, have written up research reports and produced manuals from the project. This is the kind of work we want to see going forward - how we can use science and applied research to change the way we do agriculture in this province. Umshwati, as I said, is leading the way in the sugar sector and we need to take this through to the other sectors.

President Zuma in his January 8<sup>th</sup> Statement to the ANC said that it was vitally important that as South Africans, we feed ourselves and therefore, we must be self-sufficient in food production. He also said that the return of land must enable an increase in food productivity. As the Freedom Charter says, the land shall belong to those who work it.

I want to thank you, the farmers of Umshwati, for your hard work. Please keep this up and help to ensure food security and the growth of the economy in this beautiful area of our province.

I thank you!